



The Secretary of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

July 3, 1996

ES96-000830
(Background)

The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on National Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6035

Dear Congressman Dellums:

Thank you for your January 17, 1996, letter in which you expressed concern that the purchase of irradiation services from commercial nuclear reactors for tritium production would affect the Nation's nonproliferation strategy.

The Department has begun discussions on this issue with its stakeholders. Prior to the issuance of the Final Tritium Supply and Recycling Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, we reopened the comment period to receive public input regarding its addition of the commercial reactor option to the list of reasonable alternatives for long-term tritium supply. There were a number of comments both supporting and opposing the use of existing reactors for this purpose. Subsequent to the Record of Decision, the Department published a Federal Register Notice inviting expressions of interest from owners of commercial reactors regarding the potential sale, lease, or provision of irradiation services from their facilities. The initial responses to that Notice were received by January 29, 1996. On January 16, 1996, the Department held a well-attended public meeting in Washington, D.C., to discuss the commercial reactor program, potential expressions of interest, and to receive stakeholder input on the potential use of existing reactors to make tritium.

Even though tritium is not a special nuclear material and is not covered by the same legal requirements as special nuclear materials, the Department must address the use of civilian reactors for defense purposes. We agree that it is important to discuss and resolve this issue with our stakeholders, including the Congress, over the next three years, as we move toward the selection of a primary tritium supply alternative for the Nation. While defense reactors have assisted in the production of commercial electric power, using commercial reactors for production of tritium for defense purposes would be a new undertaking. We agree that this new undertaking deserves special scrutiny. The public, other executive branch agencies, and Congress have been and will continue to be an integral part of the selection process. This dialogue will take place in part through stakeholder input regarding the site specific Environmental Impact Statement that the Department will prepare prior to making a final decision regarding the reactor or reactors that

would be used to make tritium. Any alternative chosen must meet our national security requirements, be cost-effective, environmentally sound, and protective of our nonproliferation goals.

We appreciate your interest in the Department's tritium program and invite you to join in the dialogue regarding these important issues. If you have any further questions, please contact me or have a member of your staff contact Dr. Victor H. Reis, Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs, at (202) 586-2181.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hazel R. O'Leary". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Hazel" and last name "O'Leary" clearly legible.

Hazel R. O'Leary